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OVER 90 KILLED IN MYANMAR IN BLOODIEST DAY OF PROTEST

The reprisal, coinciding with the 76th Armed Forces Day, came barely 24 hours after media warned that agitators could be shot in the head

JUNTA REITERATES PROMISE TO HOLD ELECTION

Touted as a flashpoint, the Armed Forces Day event saw junta leader Min Aung Hlaing calling the protests as acts of 'terrorism'. In his speech, Hlaing reiterated a promise to hold elections, without giving any time-frame. Eight countries — Russia, China, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Vietnam, Laos and Thailand — sent representatives to the event, while Russia sent a minister

MILITIA KILLS NINE IN RETALIATORY STRIKE

- The Karen National Union, an ethnic armed group, said it had overrun an army post near the Thai border, killing 10 people, including a lieutenant colonel, and losing one of its fighters
- Skirmishes took place in Sagaing, Yangon, Mandalay and Lashio. A one-year-old baby was shot in the eye with a rubber bullet | P9

269
ESTIMATED NUMBER OF PROTESTERS KILLED SO FAR IN THE MILITARY CRACKDOWN

CHENNAI • MADURAI • VIJAYAWADA • BENGALURU • KOCHI • HYDERABAD • VISAKHAPATNAM • COIMBATORE • KOZHIKODE • THIRUVANANTHAPURAM • BELAGAVI • BHUBANESWAR • SHIVAMOGGA • MANGALURU • TIRUPATI • TIRUCHY • TIRUNELVELI • SAMBALPUR • HUBBALLI • DHARMAPURI • KOTTAYAM • KANNUR • VILUPPURAM • KOLLAM • WARANGAL • TADEPALLIGUDEM • NAGAPATTINAM • THRISSUR • KALABURAGI

Bengal sees 80% turnout

3% less than 2016 as most migrant workers don't return to cast vote

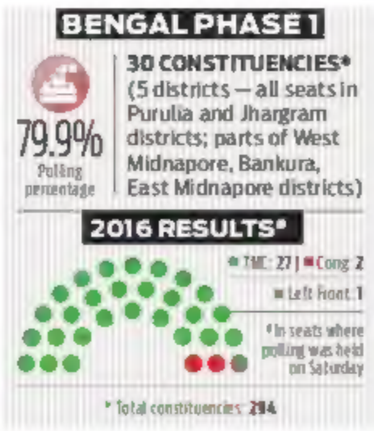
EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Kolkata

A robust 80% voter turnout was recorded in the first phase of Assembly polls in West Bengal on Saturday. The polling was expected to be much higher but it turned out to be around 3% less than that of the previous Assembly polls. Rising Covid-19 cases and the failure of migrant workers — who had left the state after public transport was thrown open following a prolonged lockdown — to return and exercise their franchise are the major reasons for the drop in turnout. A senior TMC leader said the absence of migrant workers might hurt their chances.

"It was expected that Bengalis working in other states will support us because of the hardship they faced due to the lockdown," he said. For an example, in 2016, Jhargram constituency had recorded 86% polling, but this time, the figure dropped to 80.55%.

The BJP believes it has an upper hand as it had won most of the Parliamentary seats in the region in the 2019 general elections. Voting was held in 30 Assembly segments out of 294 with 191 candidates in the fray. Over 70 lakh electorates were on the rolls to exercise their franchise. The 30 seats that went to polls on Saturday included all the 18 constituencies that had voted in the first phase in 2016, too.

Assam, which also went to polls on Saturday, recorded 76.89% turnout in the first phase for 47 seats. Analysts attributed the high turnout to competitive politics. "Last time, the aspirational votes resulted in high turnout. This time, it is due to the competitive politics," political analyst Akhil Ranjan Dutta of Gauhati University said. P7


BENGAL PHASE 1
79.9%
Polling percentage
30 CONSTITUENCIES*
(5 districts — all seats in Purulia and Jhargram districts; parts of West Midnapore, Bankura, East Midnapore districts)
2016 RESULTS*
TMC: 27 | Cong: 2
Left Front: 1
* In seats where polling was held on Saturday
* Total constituencies: 294

Voters undergo thermal scanning at a polling station in Jhargram, Bengal, on Saturday | PTI

VOTERS TORN BETWEEN DADA AND DIDI

Ear to the Ground
WEST BENGAL

SANTWANA BHATTACHARYA @ Nandigram

IF this is a war of ideas, and not a mere electoral mud-wrestling match of the usual sort, then Nandigram is the epicentre. It's a place-name that has already seared itself into the pages of Indian political history. But that was a decade ago, when it was an outlier. In 2021, Nandigram offers a different picture — a small, sharp-focused microcosmic picture of West Bengal politics as it's being played right now.

The people of Nandigram are divided. Along voting lines — which can be a euphemism for 'along religious lines'. They are also pulled by contrasting loyalties: their allegiance to 'Dada' and 'Didi'. The latter needs no explanation. Mamata Banerjee is Didi for not just Nandigram — which votes in the second phase of a long-drawn poll process — but for all of West Bengal, even India to some extent. Dada is Suvendu Adhikari, her Nandigram custodian-turned-challenger.

Suvendu may not yet have attained the eminence of a 'Dada' for the larger Bengal polity, but there's no doubting his stature here. Anything that has happened or not happened in Nandigram has his stamp on it.

That's not counting his cutouts, popping out from amidst cropland, smiling at passing vehicles with a chutzpah that's almost breathtaking, bordering on arrogance in a qualitative way. Suvendu and the Adhikari family have a close relation with these farmlands of Nandigram. He is credited with spearheading the Bhumi Uchhed Pratirodh Committee—now, that one committee not only ensured the chemical hub planned by the then Buddhadeb Bhattacharya government never materialised, it virtually led to the 'uchhed' (uprooting) of the 34-year-long Left Front government in Bengal. In that election and in the years that followed, Suvendu became the Dada, replacing the Left's Laxman Seth. It's as if he has now come to claim ownership of the very croplands he once struggled to save.

CONTINUED ON: P7

CD-gate: Woman used as pawn in politics, say parents

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

IN a curious turn of events, family members of the woman in the purported sleaze CD involving former minister Ramesh Jarkiholi, have accused Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee president D K Shivakumar of using her for his "dirty politics".

I have nothing to do with the CD case. Let them investigate the case as per law and punish the guilty
D K Shivakumar, KPCC president

The woman's parents and her brother, who appeared before the Special Investigation Team (SIT) in Bengaluru on Saturday, spoke to the media and hit out at Shivakumar for "using a girl from the ST community" for his political gains. Stating that they have given all evidence about Shivakumar's involvement to the SIT, the family pleaded with the police to ensure her safe return.

The SIT on Saturday video-recorded the statements of the family and also in written format over five hours.

The woman's father, who claimed that he was an ex-serviceman, alleged that the Congress leader had sent his daughter to Goa with money. He also hoped that the police will provide them adequate protection and requested their daughter to return.

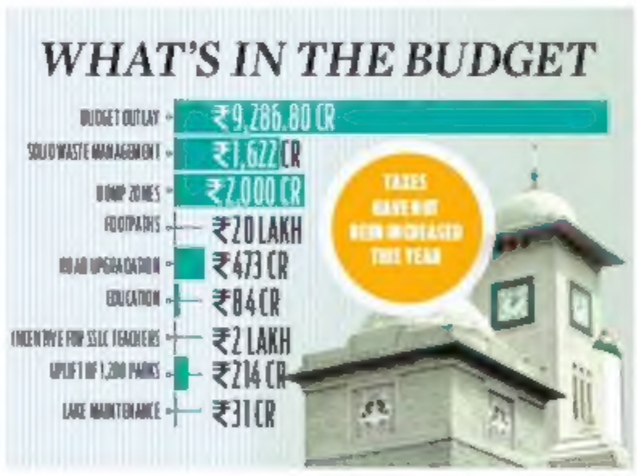
The woman's brother said, "She had come home on February 5, and spent good time with the family for a couple of days. But she has not been in contact for 20 days and her phone has remained switched off."

This came even as the woman released a fourth video statement seeking protection for her family members and stated that she was feeling tortured to the extent that she wanted to end her life.

Meanwhile, a group of Congress workers tried to barge into Jarakiholi's residence in Sadashivanagar around 7.30 pm on Saturday and shouted slogans against him, demanding his arrest. They were taken into preventive custody and later released. FULL REPORT: P4

B'LURU CIVIC BODY PLANS TO CONVERT ALL 'B' KHATAS TO 'A'

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru


WHAT'S IN THE BUDGET
BUDGET OUTLAY ₹9,286.80 CR
SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT ₹1,622 CR
BBMP ZONES ₹2,000 CR
FOOTPATHS ₹20 LAKH
ROAD UPGRADATION ₹473 CR
EDUCATION ₹84 CR
INCENTIVE FOR SSLC TEACHERS ₹2 LAKH
UPLIFT OF 1,200 PARKS ₹214 CR
LAKE MAINTENANCE ₹31 CR
TAXES HAVE NOT BEEN INCREASED THIS YEAR

RESIDENTS of Bengaluru can soon hope to have clear property documents. The Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) budget for 2021-22, which was presented on Saturday, notes that the civic body is collaborating with the Revenue Department of the State Government for conversion of all 'B' Khata properties to 'A' Khata.

Palike Administrator Gaurav Gupta said, "This will translate into a more transparent system and result in orderly growth of the city."

The Khata is a property ownership document, based on which taxes are computed. It includes location, size of the property, owner's name, built-up area and details. With the expansion of the city, many illegal construction were brought under the jurisdiction of the civic body and hence, a separate register was maintained to collect taxes from such properties, and these came under B Khata. Essentially, a piece of property with 'B' Khatha is a non-BBMP approved construction and banks are hesitant to extend loans on such properties.

A proposal to have a single type of Khata was taken up in last year's budget too. It is now in the final stages and will be a reality soon. This will help bring uniformity in property tax collection, BBMP officials added.

In July 2019, the BBMP had written to State Government to convert over 3.80 lakh properties in the city from 'B' Khata to 'A' Khata to increase the corporation's revenue. In February 2021, 12 former mayors submitted a letter to the civic body asking to clear all hurdles in converting 'B' Khata properties to 'A' Khata. The proposal was stuck with the State Government as the Supreme Court was hearing the matter along with Akrama Sakrama Scheme, wherein the government plans to legalise some types of illegal properties.

Gaurav Gupta said that he take into consideration the former mayors' proposals on Khata conversion. In the budget speech, he said, "More details will be shared once it is finalised and the necessary orders are put in place." CONTINUED ON: P3

EXPRESS READ

No yardstick for dying declaration: SC
New Delhi: The Supreme Court has said that there can be "no rigid standard or yardstick" for acceptance or rejection of dying declaration, which can form the basis for conviction if made voluntarily.

Covovax trials begin: Poonawalla
New Delhi: Serum Institute of India CEO Adar Poonawalla on Saturday said clinical trials of Covid vaccine Covovax have begun in India and the firm hopes to launch it by September this year. P7

REFORM DYNAMICS

The second day of the ThinkEdu Conclave saw Principal Economic Advisor Sanjeev Sanyal speak about ego not coming in the way of fixing the flaws in reform policies. In another session, the higher education secretary said the Centre may alter the criteria to qualify for Institute of Eminence tag | P5

WITH THIS ISSUE
CHASING THE TRUTH
PLUS 12 PAGES MAGAZINE

K'taka Covid curve rising sharply, 2.8k new cases in a day

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

KARNATAKA is now inching towards recording 3,000 Covid-19 cases a day, with the state reporting 2,886 fresh cases on Saturday. The number of active covid cases in the state crossed 20,000 after nearly three months. The last time Karnataka witnessed more than 20,000 active cases was in the second week of December. Bengaluru accounted for about 63% of the cases with 1,820 fresh cases and 14,671 active cases.

Meanwhile, Health Minister Dr K Sudhakar warned people that the state's positivity rate has gone up to 2.68%, which is higher than the national rate. He also hinted at more restrictions and stringent action for violations in the coming days. "Eight to 10 states have more active cases and Karnataka is one among them. People should exercise caution. I have requested the CM to take necessary measures to prevent spread of infection in schools and educational institutions. The CM himself will take action in this regard," he added. P4

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PANDORA'S BOX

Centre's 'meddling' affecting states' unity: Minister

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Mysuru

SURPRISING as it may seem, this barb didn't come from the Opposition. Amid arguments around Central interference in State subjects, it was none other than a minister in BJP-ruled Karnataka who called out the Union Government for "encroaching" upon subjects in the State and Concurrent Lists of the Constitution, leaving Karnataka and other states like Tamil Nadu at a disadvantage.

Minor Irrigation Minister **J C Madhuswamy**, who was recently relieved of the Law and Parliamentary Affairs ministry, minced no words when he said that the "authoritarian policies" of the Central Government has hurt the unity between states and is fuelling regionalism in the country. For good measure, he even asked Bengaluru South MP and party colleague Tejasvi Surya, who was present at the event, to raise the issue in Parliament.

"We should have become liberalised with progression. Instead, it is becoming centralised. The policy of pulling down progressive states to the level of under-developed ones is similar to the policies of Indira Gandhi, which we ourselves criticised then," he said at a seminar on 'National Integration and Regional Freedom', hosted by the Akhila Bharatiya Sharana Sahitya Parishad in Mysuru on Saturday.

To buttress his argument, he cited the examples of NEET and CET, alleging that students from Karnataka and in-service doctors wanting to pursue higher education are at disadvantage while students from other states populate institutions here. CONTINUED ON: P2

Education is a State subject, and yet it was interfered with. As a result, many from the north are populating medical seats here while leaving several seats vacant, which should have gone to locals. This will trigger a dearth of specialist doctors
J C Madhuswamy, Minor Irrigation Minister